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ABSTRACT

This report presents findings from the Paperwork Substudy of the Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE), which explores issues of teacher quality. In the Paperwork Substudy, researchers surveyed a subsample of special education teachers (n=972) who completed the original SPeNSE interview to collect more detailed information about administrative duties and paperwork such as time spent, variations in time spent, and perceived usefulness of the paperwork. Findings indicated teachers spent an average of 5 hours a week on paperwork, a number that varied by region. The study examined how variations in time spent on paperwork related to job design, IEP (individualized education program) variables, access to technology, and assistance with paperwork. Some conclusions were: (1) teachers spend less time writing IEPs if they select from pre-developed lists of annual goals and update only those portions that require changes; and (2) teachers with limited access to computer equipment are 5 times as likely as those with excellent access to report insufficient time to complete administrative duties and paperwork. Although teachers generally reported specific paperwork as useful, 88% indicated that administrative duties and paperwork generally interfered with their job of teaching to a moderate or great extent. Five possible policy recommendations are offered. Supporting data tables for each survey question are appended. (DB)

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SPeNSE: Study of Personnel Needs In Special Education

Final Report of the Paperwork Substudy

Contract #ED00CO0010
March 24, 2003

by

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Sheri Klein

Submitted to:

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Special Education

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Introduction

In a national survey conducted in 2000, 53 percent of elementary and secondary special education teachers reported that routine duties and paperwork interfered with their job of teaching to a great extent. After controlling for many other working conditions, paperwork emerged as significant in the manageability of special education teachers' jobs and their intent to stay in the profession (SPeNSE, 2002). In a list of concerns rank ordered by special education teachers, paperwork was third, just behind caseloads and time for planning (Coleman, 2000).

Special education teachers typically spend over 10 percent of their time completing forms and doing administrative paperwork (SPeNSE, 2002; Coleman, 2000). As Congress and the U.S. Department of Education prepare for the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), paperwork requirements have emerged as a focal area of concern. Yet very little empirical data are available on the types of paperwork special education teachers complete; the instructional relevance of the paperwork; or how teachers, schools, and districts manage paperwork burden.

This report presents findings from the Paperwork Substudy of the Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE)—a study conducted by Westat for the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), U.S. Department of Education. SPeNSE explored issues of teacher quality and factors affecting teacher quality. Data were collected through telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of special and general education teachers and other service providers. The Paperwork Substudy was a follow-up to SPeNSE in which researchers surveyed a subsample of special education teachers who completed the original SPeNSE interview to collect more detailed information about paperwork. The survey had three overarching questions:

1. How much time do special education teachers spend on specific administrative duties and paperwork?
2. What explains variation in hours devoted to administrative duties and paperwork?
3. How useful is the paperwork that special education teachers complete?

Methods

Instrument Development

To inform instrument development, Westat conducted three focus groups with special education teachers. Each focus group included 5-8 teachers and was facilitated by a Westat employee. Focus group members were selected purposively from among those who completed the initial SPeNSE survey to reflect variation in hours devoted to paperwork and perceptions of paperwork burden. During the focus groups, teachers discussed the types of paperwork they complete, the time associated with those tasks, and which tasks were especially burdensome. From these discussions, Westat developed the survey instruments in collaboration with OSEP staff. Westat staff also pilot tested the instruments to identify unclear items. The final instrument addressed specific types of paperwork teachers complete, the amount of time they require, and ways to reduce paperwork burden.

Sampling and Notification

In August 2002, Westat selected a sample of 1,333 special education teachers for the Paperwork Substudy from among 5,427 teachers who completed the initial SPeNSE survey[1] and served primarily the following types of students:

- Children ages 3-5 with disabilities;
- Students (ages 6-21) with visual or hearing impairments;
- Students (ages 6-21) with emotional disturbance;
- Students (ages 6-21) with other types of disabilities.

The Paperwork sample is a systematic probability sample with implicit stratification. The implicit strata are defined by geographic region, size, and personnel type. Implicit stratification was achieved by sorting the list of eligible teachers from the paperwork sample of 1,333 by these stratification variables. To ensure randomness, the list was further sorted by random number assigned to each sampling unit within implicit strata.

The regions correspond to six Regional Resource Centers (Northeast, Mid-South, Southeast, Great Lakes, Mountain Plains, Western). The size strata have six groups. The first four size groups are based on local educational agency (LEA) enrollment (Very Large: 50,000 or more, Large: 10,000-49,999, Medium: 2,500-9,999, and Small: fewer than 2,500). The fifth category represents intermediate education units (IEUs), and State schools for students with visual or hearing impairments constitute the sixth category. The

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[1] SPeNSE included telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of local administrators, special and general education teachers, speech-language pathologists, and paraprofessionals in spring and fall 2000. Forty-six percent of sampled districts and 69 percent of sampled service providers participated. Weight adjustments were used to address nonresponse bias but care should be used in interpreting results.

personnel type corresponds to the type of students the teachers serve, as described in the bulleted list above.

To identify teachers who were no longer working as special educators in their sampled district, Westat sent letters to local special education administrators informing them of the follow-up study and asking them to verify the names and contact information of the sampled teachers in their districts. If a sampled teacher had left the district or was no longer teaching special education, the administrator was asked to provide the name and contact information of the teacher's replacement. If there was no replacement for a sampled teacher, that teacher was considered an ineligible respondent. Sixteen percent of the sampled special education teachers were replaced.

Sampled teachers were notified by mail. Letters included background information on the substudy, provisions for maintaining confidentiality of responses and data security, a description of the individuals and organizations involved in the substudy, the benefits to be derived from the study, and a toll-free number for completing an interview or making an appointment to do so. Westat provided a financial incentive of $15 to study respondents.

Data Collection

The Paperwork Substudy interviews were conducted from October 7, 2002, through November 20, 2002, by staff at Westat's Telephone Research Center (TRC). Interviewers received training on the procedures for contacting schools and teachers as well as the content of the survey. They received up to 8 hours of initial training, depending on their experience, plus follow-up instruction as needed. Interviews were monitored on site as well as through remote access.

The first question of the interview screened respondents to ensure that they were eligible to participate. Thirty-seven respondents who were not currently teaching were deemed ineligible for the survey. Interviewers thanked these individuals for their time, verified their mailing address to send them the $15 incentive, and terminated the interview. In all, we found 109 sampled teachers ineligible through either district verification or responses to the first question of the interview.

Response Rate

Westat selected 1,333 special education teachers for the follow-up, knowing that some would be ineligible or unreachable during the data collection period. After 6 weeks of data collection, 972 interviews were completed, and 109 teachers were found ineligible, for a response rate of 79 percent.

Data Cleaning

Finalized interviews were sent to Westat's data preparation facility prior to being keyed. Westat's data preparation staff receipted the interviews into an Access database. The data preparation manager created the codebook and wrote edit specifications for the machine

edit program. For completed interviews, Westat coders performed manual editing simultaneously with coding. Manual editing of the interviews included checking for the following problems:

- illegible answers;
- incorrectly followed skip instructions;
- items not answered;
- responses outside the ranges of acceptable answers specified in the coding manual (range check);
- responses of an incorrect character length; and
- inappropriate responses.

Research staff also examined the open-ended responses and generated response codes for the question *Apart from those we've already discussed, what other special education administrative duties and paperwork, if any, consume a significant amount of your time in a typical month?* Each respondent could be assigned up to two codes for the question. Those codes, not the actual responses, were part of the data set.

Coded interviews were sent to Westat's data entry facility for keying. After data collection was completed, the data preparation manager conducted additional machine edits and reviewed response frequencies to ensure that responses were internally consistent and within acceptable ranges.

Weighting

Westat statisticians developed the sampling weights needed to generate national estimates. The final step in the weighting process was to post-stratify the nonresponse-adjusted weights to the special education teacher population in the United States. The control totals were obtained from state-reported data submitted to OSEP on the number of teachers employed to provide special education and related services for children and youth with disabilities during the 2000-2001 school year (available at www.ideadata.org).

Analysis

The interview data were converted into a SAS data set, and subsequent analyses were done in WesVar. Chi-squares and analysis of variance were used to test for significant differences between two variables.

To help explain variation in paperwork, Westat developed several logistic regression models. Multiple logistic regression was used to model the relationship between a dichotomous outcome variable (special education teachers with and without enough time to complete administrative duties and paperwork) and several predictors. The predictors included caseload, number of students for whom the teachers had case management responsibilities, years of teaching experience in special education, whether teachers rewrite the entire IEP or only portions of it at annual review, on what schedule teachers

update IEPs, and teachers' access to computer equipment (see table A-1 in appendix A). Before developing the models, all variables related to time on administrative duties and paperwork were converted to a uniform scale, hours per week.

The approach was to build up a hierarchy of multiple logistic regression models. The predictors or interaction terms were added systematically. One model was connected to other models. Whenever it was possible, each finding was based on the median of the number of students served by special educators. To display key findings from the models, fitted values were plotted against the values of selected predictors. In such figures, the remaining undisplayed predictors were set to their median values, so that the fitted curves represent the specified relationship for the typical special education teacher.

Results

This section presents results from the SPeNSE Paperwork Substudy. The results are organized around the three broad study questions: How much time do special education teachers spend on specific administrative duties and paperwork? What explains variation in hours devoted to administrative duties and paperwork? How useful is the paperwork that special education teachers complete? The descriptive statistics for each item in the survey are listed in appendix table A-2.

How much time do special education teachers spend on specific administrative duties and paperwork?

The typical special education teacher spends 5 hours per week on administrative duties and paperwork.[2] This finding was consistent with results from the original SPeNSE survey.

Teachers were asked a series of questions about time devoted to the process of writing individualized education programs (IEPs). They said they spend an average of 2 hours on each IEP (range: 0 to 30 hours; 99.7 percent of respondents between 0 and 20 hours),

- 1.5 hours attending each IEP meeting (range: 0 to 30 hours; 99.7 percent of respondents between 0 and 16 hours),
- 4 hours per month printing or copying special education forms (range: 0 to 125 hours; 99.5 percent of respondents between 0 and 40 hours),
- 2 hours per month scheduling IEP meetings (range: 0 to 40 hours; 99.8 percent of respondents between 0 and 20 hours),
- 1 hour per month mailing notices to parents (range: 0 to 30 hours; 99.6 percent of respondents between 0 and 16 hours), and
- 4 hours per month tracking paperwork from other teachers that is required for the IEP process or other aspects of special education (range: 0 to 70 hours; 99.4 percent of respondents between 0 and 30 hours).

[2] median=4.6; mean=6.3.

Special education teachers were also asked about the time they spend on initial and triennial evaluations. While only 35 percent of special education teachers conduct initial evaluations for students referred for special education, those who do evaluations spend 7.5 hours per month conducting assessments and 4.2 hours per month reviewing existing assessment information.

Roughly half of all special education teachers (51 percent) conduct triennial evaluations to determine if students are still eligible for special education. Those who do triennial evaluations spend, on average, 5 hours per month conducting assessments and 3 hours per month reviewing existing assessment information.

Student behavior is another task on which some teachers spend considerable time. On average, special education teachers devote 5 hours per month keeping behavior logs to track the frequency of specific student behaviors, 2 hours per month writing behavioral intervention plans, and 2 hours per month completing functional behavioral assessments.

Completing report cards, progress reports, interim reports, and similar documents also consumes a sizable portion of special educators' time. On average, special education teachers must complete a written report for parents on student progress every 7 weeks, and completing those reports takes 8 hours. Interestingly, 80 percent of special education teachers reported that their progress reports contain more detail than reports for nondisabled students.

In addition to the responsibilities listed above, the average special education teacher spends 3 hours per month on post-school transition planning and 1 hour per month on Part C to Part B transition. However, it is important to remember that many teachers do not serve students in the age ranges requiring these activities. These tasks are considerably more time consuming for teachers serving children ages 14 and older or age 3. Among special education teachers who conduct post-school transition planning, the average time commitment for this task is 6 hours per month. For special education teachers who complete Part C to preschool transition planning, the task takes, on average, 3 hours per month.

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of time special education teachers devote to specific paperwork tasks by dividing the time spent on each task by the time on all tasks combined. The first chart includes teachers who do not conduct initial or triennial evaluations; the second includes only those teachers who conduct evaluations. These charts emphasize the point that evaluations are time-consuming activities for the minority of teachers who conduct them.

When asked if the time they devoted to administrative duties and paperwork was adequate, 25 percent of special education teachers said *not at all;* 32 percent said it was adequate to a *small extent;* 33 percent said *moderate extent;* and 10 percent said it was adequate to a *great extent*. This implies that special education teachers could spend considerably more time on administrative duties and paperwork than they already do.

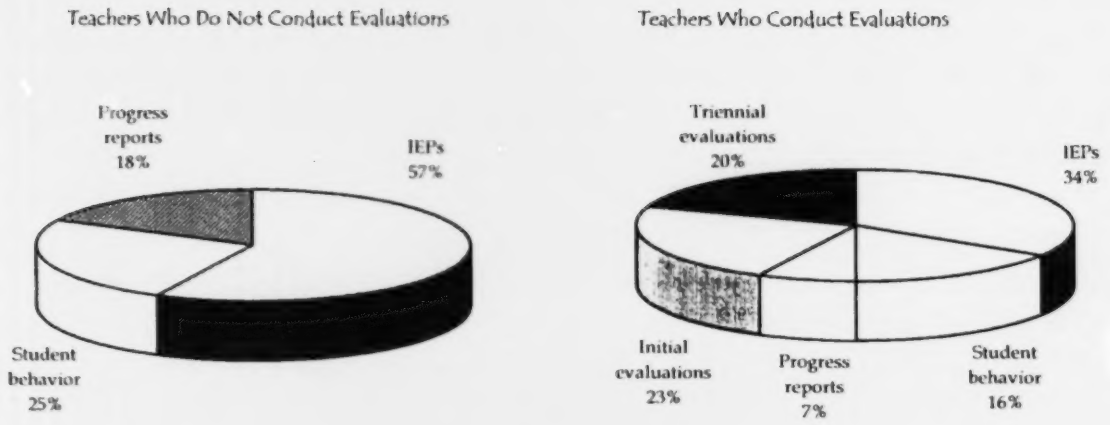

Figure 1. Percentage of time special education teachers devote to specific administrative duties and paperwork.

What explains variation in hours devoted to administrative duties and paperwork?

Data from the initial SPeNSE survey suggested that there was considerable variation in the amount of time special education teachers devoted to paperwork. For example, the average hours spent on administrative duties and paperwork varied significantly by geographic region, with the Northeast having the lowest paperwork burden (see Figure 2). This result was replicated in the Paperwork Substudy.

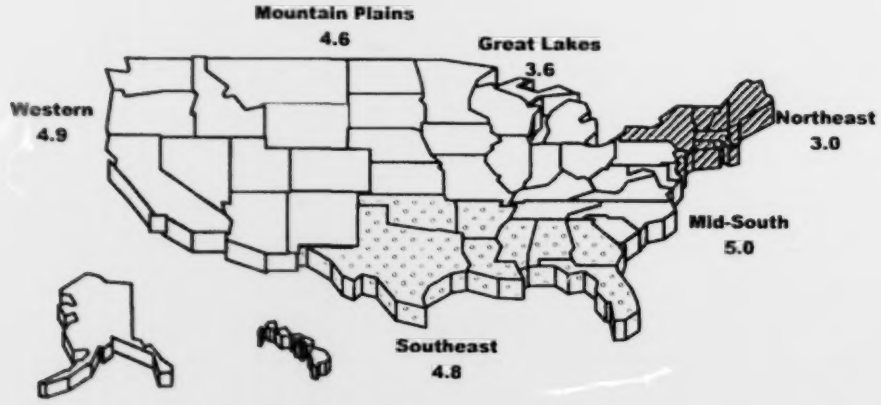

Figure 2. Median hours per week on administrative duties and paperwork, by region

It was not clear from the original SPeNSE study what accounted for variation in paperwork burden. In the Paperwork Substudy, researchers explored four avenues in their search for explanations:

- job design,
- IEP practices,
- access to technology, and
- assistance with paperwork.

Job Design

Several job design issues played a part in explaining variation in paperwork, including caseload and case management responsibilities. On average, teachers spent 0.4 hours per week per child on administrative duties and paperwork for children they taught. That figure was 0.6 hours per week for children for whom they served as case manager, meaning they were responsible for tracking student progress; planning, organizing, and summarizing IEP meeting notes; and coordinating services across teachers. The case management function was clearly tied to paperwork responsibilities.

Two other job responsibilities that were linked to administrative duties and paperwork were initial and triennial evaluations. Special education teachers who conducted initial evaluations or triennial evaluations reported spending significantly more time on paperwork than those who did not. In both cases, the difference was roughly 1 hour per week. Thirty-five percent of special education teachers conduct initial evaluations, and 51 percent conduct triennial evaluations.

IEP Practices

On average, special education teachers spent 2 hours on each IEP. This was significantly lower for teachers who had a list of IEP goals from which to choose in preparing IEPs (2.2 hours compared to 2.6 hours) and for teachers who did not rewrite the entire document at annual review, but only rewrote those portions of the IEP where changes were needed (2.0 hours compared to 2.5 hours).

Most variables related to IEP practices were not significantly related to the total hours teachers devoted to administrative duties and paperwork, perhaps because IEPs comprised only a moderate portion of that time. The insignificant correlates to total hours of adminstrative duties and paperwork included whether the district allowed teachers to add an addendum to the IEP, the extent to which teachers rewrote the same information in different sections of the IEP, the schedule for annual IEP reviews (e.g., anniversary of last IEP, student's birthday, etc.), and whether teachers selected from a list of goals in writing IEPs. However, some of these variables were significant predictors in the logistic regression models presented later in this report.

Access to reliable computers was not related to the time teachers spent on administrative duties and paperwork. However, it was a significant predictor in a logistic regression model to be presented later. Seventy percent of teachers reported using a computer, at least in part, for writing IEPs. Using a computer to prepare IEPs was not significantly related to time spent writing each IEP or completing administrative duties and paperwork, in general. Teachers who used computers said their computer equipment was quite reliable and their access to the equipment was good or excellent.

Assistance with Paperwork

Last year, the average special education teacher had coverage for their class for 2 days so they could complete special education administrative duties and paperwork. In addition, on average, teachers had 50 minutes during the school day in which they could complete administrative duties and paperwork. Fifty percent of special educators had no help from a paraprofessional, volunteer, or secretary in completing administrative duties and paperwork.

The amount of help teachers had was not significantly related to the time they spent on administrative duties and paperwork or to whether administrative duties and paperwork interfered with their job of teaching. This may be the case because much of the paperwork teachers complete cannot be appropriately delegated to an aide or secretary.

Regression Models

To better explain the variation in paperwork burden across teachers, Westat developed a series of logistic regression models. As discussed previously, the mean number of hours special education teachers devoted to administrative duties and paperwork was 6 hours per week; the median was 5 hours per week. However, teachers reported having only 4 hours available in which to complete these duties. In addition, special education teachers received coverage for their classes 2 days per year or 0.07 hours per week to complete administrative duties and paperwork. In other words, there was a two-hour discrepancy between the number of hours teachers needed to complete their administrative duties and paperwork and the number of hours they actually had available.

Because it was not normally distributed,[3] time on administrative duties and paperwork could not be used as the outcome variable for regression models. Instead, for the regression models, the dependent variable combined three survey items to classify special education teachers into two groups—those who had enough time to complete administrative duties and paperwork and those who did not have enough time to complete administrative duties and paperwork. The formula for grouping special education teachers into the two groups was as follows:

(Hours per typical week completing administrative duties and paperwork) - (hours per school week available to complete administrative duties and paperwork) - (hours of coverage for class in the past year)

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[3] Attempts to manipulate the variable to achieve a normal distribution were unsuccessful.

If the result was greater than zero, the special education teachers were classified as not having enough time to complete administrative duties and paperwork. If the result was equal to or less than zero, the special education teachers were classified as having enough time to complete administrative duties and paperwork.

There were 550 special education teachers who did not have enough time to complete their administrative duties and paperwork, and 403 who had enough time to complete their administrative duties and paperwork. Special education teachers who did not have enough time to complete administrative duties and paperwork spent, on average, about 9 hours per week on administrative duties and paperwork, which was 3 times longer than those who had enough time.

The special education teachers who did not have enough time to complete administrative duties and paperwork spent more time across many different tasks, such as completing IEPs, student evaluation, student behavior, transition planning, and student progress reports. They also had less time during the school day to complete the administrative duties and paperwork they were assigned (3.07 hours per week versus 5.60 hours per week) and less coverage for their classes (0.06 hours per week versus 0.08 hours per week).

The biggest differences between the two groups included time spent on:

- printing or making copies of forms specific to special education,
- scheduling IEP meetings,
- mailing notices to parents,
- tracking paperwork from other teachers that is required for the IEP process or other aspects of special education,
- conducting initial evaluations,
- conducting triennial evaluations,
- completing functional behavioral assessments,
- participating in manifestation determination reviews,
- keeping behavior logs to track frequencies of specific student behaviors, and
- writing behavioral intervention plans.

To validate the dependent variable, we examined its relationship to two additional survey items, whether teachers reported that 1) they had adequate time to complete the required administrative duties and paperwork and 2) whether administrative duties and paperwork interfered with their job of teaching.

The dependent variable created for this analysis was significantly associated with each of the other two variables. Teachers who were categorized as having inadequate time to complete their administrative duties and paperwork were more likely than those categorized as having enough time to report that their time was inadequate for completing required administrative duties and paperwork, $\chi^2(2.6, N=949) = 17.3, p<.01$.

Likewise, teachers who were categorized as having inadequate time to complete their administrative duties and paperwork were more likely than those categorized as having enough time to indicate that administrative duties and paperwork interfered with their job of teaching, $\chi^2(2.8, N=949) = 32.1, p<.01$.

The first in a series of logistic regression models showed the relationship between years of teaching experience and whether special education teachers had enough time to complete administrative duties and paperwork. Overall, 50 percent of special education teachers who taught 1-3 years did not have enough time to complete administrative duties and paperwork. The proportion increased steadily with years of experience until it reached 70 percent for special education teachers who had taught about 40 years (See figure 3).

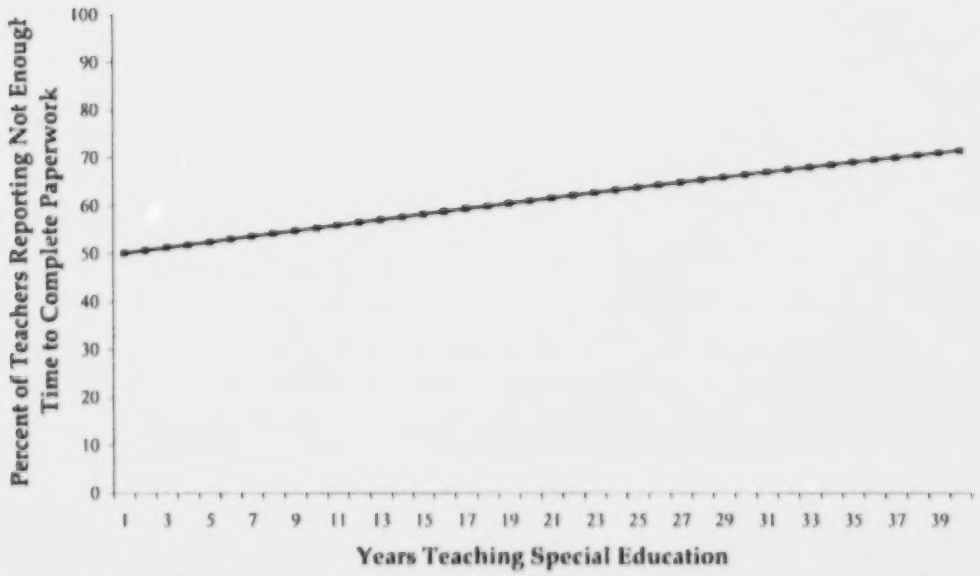

Figure 3. Percent of teachers reporting not enough time to complete paperwork by years teaching special education.

The second model showed that the risk of not having enough time to complete administrative duties and paperwork was higher for those special education teachers who rewrote the entire IEP at annual review rather than rewriting only those sections where changes were needed. This was consistent across 1-40 years of teaching experience. In fact, after controlling for caseload and case management responsibilities, special education teachers who rewrote the entire IEP had a 15 percent higher risk than those who only rewrote portions of the IEP of being in the group of teachers who did not have enough time to complete administrative duties and paperwork, regardless of their years of experience (see Figure 4).

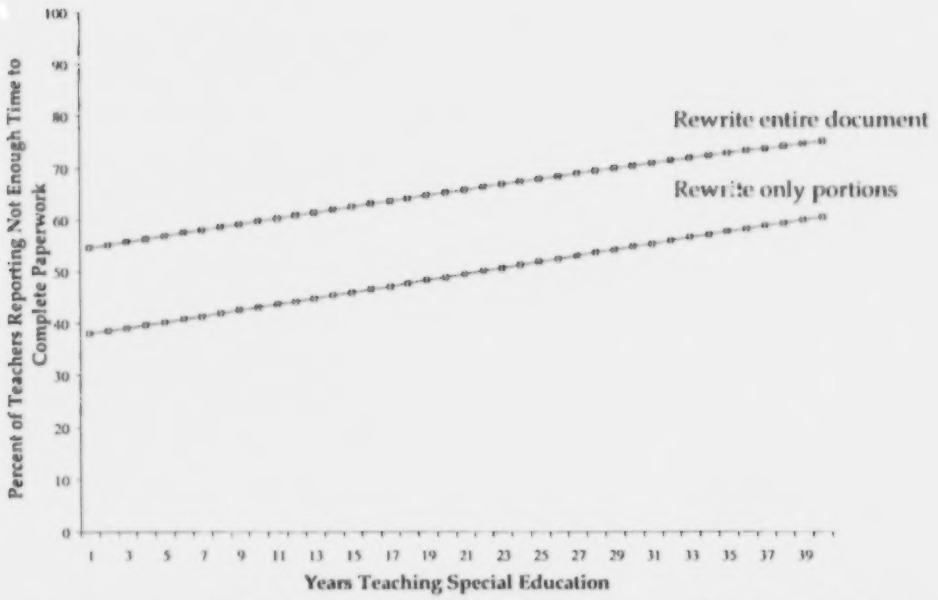

Figure 4. Controlling for caseload, case management responsibilities, and the interaction between years of experience and case management responsibilities, percentage of teachers without enough time to complete paperwork, by whether teachers rewrote the entire IEP at annual review or only portions of it, by years of experience.

Schedules for IEP review were associated with whether teachers had enough time to complete their administrative duties and paperwork after controlling for caseload and case management responsibilities. As shown in Figure 5, regardless of years of experience, teachers who completed all their IEPs at the same time of year were less likely than teachers who updated IEPs on students' birthdays to be categorized as having insufficient time to complete their administrative duties and paperwork. Because completing IEPs on the students' birthdays was relatively rare, however, caution should be used in interpreting this result.

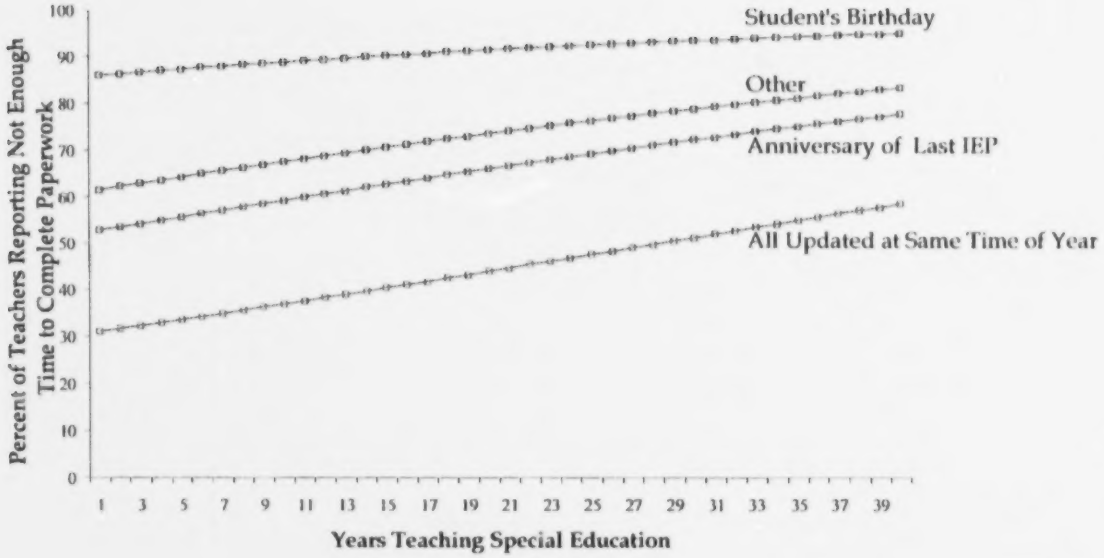

Figure 5. Controlling for caseload, case management responsibilities, and the interaction between years of experience and case management responsibilities, percentage of teachers without enough time to complete administrative duties and paperwork, by years of experience, by schedule for updating IEPs.

The fourth and final model showed that reliable access to computer equipment for completing IEPs was an important determinant for the risk of having inadequate time to complete administrative duties and paperwork after controlling for other differences. Those special education teachers with poor access to computer equipment were 5 times as likely as those with excellent access to have insufficient time to complete administrative duties and paperwork (odds ratio = 5.47) (See Figure 6).

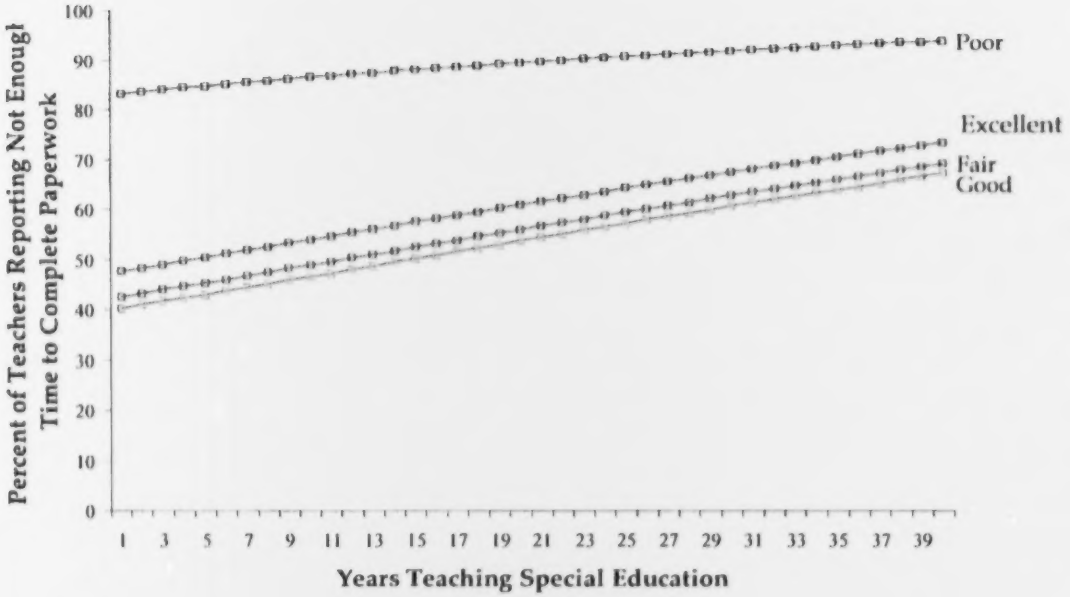

Figure 6. Controlling for caseload, case management responsibilities, and the interaction between years of experience and case management responsibilities, percentage of teachers without enough time to complete administrative duties and paperwork, by years of experience, by access to computer equipment.

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the results of the logistic regression models and provide odds ratios for the estimates. We examined other variables from the survey that we thought might be related to the dependent variable, including whether IEPs were written by hand or computer, whether teachers conducted initial or triennial evaluations, and time spent on transition processes. None of these variables were significant in the model (see Table A-1 for a complete list of predictors).

Table 1. Fitted Logistic Regression Models Describing the Probability of Not Having Enough Time for Administrative Duties and Paperwork.

Predictors	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
INTERCEPT	-0.01987	-0.90390*	0.01673	-0.43195
Q3YRNEW	0.02329*	0.04999*	0.05647**	0.04918*
Q1		-0.00368	-0.00340	-0.00396
Q2		0.03758	0.03959	0.03066
Q3YRNEWQ2		-0.00221	-0.00228	-0.00174
Q12.1		0.67333**		
Q14.1			-0.35772	
Q14.2			1.34375	
Q14.3			-1.26188*	
Q9.1				1.69879**
Q9.2				-0.29403
Q9.3				-0.20276
Negative log likelihood:	0.00642	0.02431	0.03926	0.05205
Likelihood ratio (Cox-Snell):	0.00871	0.03247	0.05194	0.06861
Likelihood ratio (Estrella):	0.00874	0.03287	0.05296	0.07039

# p<.10 * p<.05 ** p<.01

Note: Replicate weights are incorporated into the analyses.

Table 2. Odds Ratios for Fitted Logistic Regression Models Describing the Probability of Not Having Enough Time for Administrative Duties and Paperwork.

Model 1			
Predictors	Estimate	Lower 95% Confidence Interval	Upper 95% Confidence Interval
Q3YRNew	1.02357	1.00006	1.04762
Model 2			
Predictors	Estimate	Lower 95% Confidence Interval	Upper 95% Confidence Interval
Q3YRNew	1.05126	1.00498	1.09968
Q1	0.99633	0.98248	1.01037
Q2	1.03830	0.98052	1.09948
Q3YRNEWQ2	0.99779	0.99472	1.00088
Q12.1	1.96076	1.21548	3.16301
Model 3			
Predictors	Estimate	Lower 95% Confidence Interval	Upper 95% Confidence Interval
Q3YRNew	1.05809	1.01251	1.10573
Q1	0.99661	0.98258	1.01084
Q2	1.04039	0.98481	1.09910
Q3YRNEWQ2	0.99772	0.99471	1.00074
Q14.1	0.69927	0.26085	1.87452
Q14.2	3.83340	0.31523	46.61664
Q14.3	0.28312	0.08931	0.89753
Model 4			
Predictors	Estimate	Lower 95% Confidence Interval	Upper 95% Confidence Interval
Q3YRNew	1.05041	1.00111	1.10214
Q1	0.99605	0.97849	1.01393
Q2	1.03113	0.97619	1.08917
Q3YRNEWQ2	0.99827	0.99529	1.00125
Q9.1	5.46732	2.48897	12.00963
Q9.2	0.74525	0.29389	1.88986
Q9.3	0.81648	0.46349	1.43828

Note: Replicate weights are incorporated into the analyses.

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How useful is the paperwork special education teachers complete?

Paperwork generally has a negative connotation; yet, some paperwork may be valuable in helping teachers educate their students. Teachers in the follow-up survey were asked to rate what forms of paperwork were most and least helpful. With regard to IEPs, documenting students' present level of performance and writing short-term objectives were considered most helpful to over 25 percent of special education teachers.

Table 3. Parts of the IEP Process That Special Education Teachers Found Most and Least Helpful in Educating Their Students

	Percent of Teachers	Percent of Teachers
Part of the IEP Process	Most helpful	Least helpful
Documenting present level of performance	30%	11%
Writing short-term objectives	27%	13%
Attending IEP meetings	17%	18%
Deciding on services, accommodations, and support	16%	22%
Writing annual goals	8%	22%
None of the above	2%	14%

Note: None of the above was not an option that was read to respondents. It was only coded if they refused to select one of the other options.

In conducting initial evaluations for special education eligibility, 65 percent of teachers reported that discussing assessment results with colleagues was *most helpful* in educating their students. The results were similar for triennial evaluations, with 48 percent of teachers indicating that discussing results with colleagues was *most helpful*.

Student behavior can generate its own forms of paperwork. When asked about the relative helpfulness of paperwork related to behavior, 55 percent of special education teachers said keeping behavioral logs to track the frequency of specific behaviors was *most helpful* in educating their students, and 25 percent said writing behavioral intervention plans was *most helpful*. Fifty-one percent reported that participating in manifestation determination reviews was *least helpful* in educating their students.

When asked a similar set of questions about processes involving post-school transition, 40 percent of special education teachers who conducted transition planning said talking with representatives of other agencies was *most helpful*, and 30 percent said arranging transition-related courses and work experience was *most helpful*. For Part C transition, 42 percent of special education teachers engaged in Part C to Part B transition said talking with representatives of other agencies was *most helpful*, and 25 percent said attending the required transition planning meetings was *most helpful*.

Despite these ratings, 88 percent of special education teachers indicated that administrative duties and paperwork interfered with their job of teaching to a moderate extent (32 percent) or great extent (46 percent). While these results may seem

contradictory at first, that is not necessarily the case. Teachers were not asked how helpful they found specific administrative duties and paperwork but, rather, how they rated the relative helpfulness of specific activities.

Even if teachers found administrative duties and paperwork helpful, those duties might still interfere with teaching if they take time away from instruction. Teachers who said that administrative duties and paperwork did not interfere at all with their job of teaching or that it interfered to a small extent spent an average of 4 hours per week on administrative duties and paperwork. That compares with 5 hours per week for those who said administrative duties and paperwork interfered to a moderate extent, and 8 hours for those who said they interfered to a great extent. Teachers reported having 50 minutes a day (i.e., 4 hours a week) during the school day in which they could complete administrative duties and paperwork. Therefore, it seems logical that paperwork requirements exceeding 4 hours a week were viewed as particularly burdensome, since they impinged on teachers' evenings, weekends, or class time.

Summary and Implications

Paperwork burden in special education is an issue primarily because it affects (1) the time teachers can devote to instruction and (2) teacher retention. The SPeNSE Paperwork Substudy provided considerably more information than was previously available on the types of paperwork teachers complete, how long it takes, and what affects time devoted to paperwork. Based on the data from this study, we present the following key findings:

- Responsibility for initial and triennial evaluations contributes considerably to the administrative duties and paperwork special education teachers complete.
- Case management responsibility is significantly associated with the time devoted to paperwork.
- Teachers spend less time writing each IEP if they select from pre-developed lists of annual goals.
- Teachers devote less time to writing each IEP if they update only those portions of the IEP that require changes at annual review rather than rewriting the entire document.
- Teachers whose administrative duties and paperwork exceed 4 hours a week are more likely to perceive those responsibilities as interfering with their job of teaching.
- After controlling for other differences, the risk of not having enough time to complete administrative duties and paperwork was higher for special education teachers who rewrote the entire IEP at annual review rather than rewriting only those sections where changes were needed.
- After controlling for other differences, teachers with poor access to computer equipment were 5 times as likely as those with excellent access to have insufficient time to complete administrative duties and paperwork.

These findings suggest a number of possible implications for policy and practice that may result in reductions in paperwork and administrative duties. It should be remembered, however, that actual and perceived paperwork burden is a product of a number of factors that vary widely among teachers, districts and States. Consequently, no one intervention is likely to be a universal remedy, and all interventions should be evaluated to determine both their intended and unintended effects. Possible interventions include:

- Assign other school personnel (e.g., school psychologists) the responsibility for initial and triennial evaluations, or to the extent that teachers must retain these duties, adjust their teaching responsibilities to allow sufficient time.
- Credit special education teachers for the time needed for case management when defining job responsibilities.
- Consider the potential value of allowing teachers to select from lists of annual goals when writing IEPs.
- Re-examine the process for IEP review. Encourage teachers to update only those portions of the IEP that require changes at annual review rather than rewriting the entire document.
- Limit administrative duties and paperwork to 3 or 4 hours a week unless teaching responsibilities are reduced proportionally. Invest in hardware, software and technological support so teachers have access to reliable computers to manage paperwork responsibilities.

References

Coleman, M.R. (2000). *Conditions for special education teaching: Council for Exceptional Children Commission technical report.* Special Education Teaching Conditions Initiative.

SPeNSE. (2002). *Paperwork in special education.* Retrieved April 8, 2002, from www.spense.org.

Appendix A

Supporting Tables

Table A-1. Predictor Variables for Logistic Regression Models

Predictor	Description
Q3YRNEW	Years teacher has taught special education[1]
Q1	Number of students to whom teacher provides direct services or case management
Q2	Number of students for whom teacher serves as the case manager
Q3YRNEWQ2	Years teacher has taught special education multiplied by the number of students for whom teacher serves as the case manager
Q7	Whether IEPs are written by hand or with a computer 1=Written by hand 2=Written using a computer, or 3=A combination, with some sections written by hand and some by computer
Q9	Accessibility of computer equipment used for completing IEPs 1=Poor 2=Fair 3=Good 4=Excellent
Q10	Whether teacher is allowed to add an addendum to the IEP or has to rewrite the entire IEP to make a change 1=Allows an addendum 2=Must rewrite IEP
Q11	Extent to which teacher writes or copies the same information in different sections of the IEP 1=Not at all 2=To a small extent 3=To a moderate extent 4=To a great extent
Q12	For annual IEP reviews, whether teacher rewrites the entire document or only those portions where changes are needed 1=Rewrite entire document 2=Rewrite only portions
Q13	Number of students for whom teacher wrote more than one IEP last year
Q14	Annual schedule for updating IEPs 1=Anniversary of the students' last IEP 2=The student's birthday 3=All IEPs are updated at the same time of year 4=Other
Q15	Whether teacher has a list of IEP goals from which to choose in writing IEPs 1=Yes 2=No
Q20	Whether teacher conducts initial eligibility evaluations 1=Yes 2=No

Table A-1. Predictor Variables for Logistic Regression Models

Predictor	Description
Q22	Specific part of initial evaluations that helps the teacher the most in educating students 1=Conducting eligibility assessments 2=Writing reports of assessment results 3=Completing referrals for initial evaluations 4=Discussing assessment results with colleagues 5=None of the above

[1]Teachers who reported months were rounded to the nearest whole year.

Q24	Whether teacher conducts triennial evaluations 1=Yes 2=No
Q30	Specific process surrounding student behavior that helps the teacher the least in educating students 1=Completing functional behavioral assessments 2=Participating in manifestation determination reviews 3=Keeping behavior logs to track frequencies of specific students behaviors 4=Writing behavioral intervention plans 5=None of the above
Q32	Part of the post-school transition process that helps the teacher the most in educating students 1=Talking with representatives of other agencies about a students' transition needs 2=Conducting assessments that inform the transition process 3=Arranging transition related courses and work experiences 4=Documenting transition plans and services 5=None of the above
Q38	Frequency with which teacher prepares reports on the progress of students with disabilities compared to frequency required for regular education students 1=More often 2=As often 3=Less often
Q40	Detail of progress reports for students with disabilities compared to detail of progress reports for regular education students 1=Same detail 2=Less detail 3=More detail
Q41	Number of students for whom teacher completed Medicaid reimbursement forms or other third-party payment forms

Table A-1. Predictor Variables for Logistic Regression Models

Predictor	Description
Q45	Extent to which teacher receives help from a paraprofessional, instructional assistant, parent volunteer, or secretary in completing administrative duties and paperwork 1=Not at all 2=To a small extent 3=To a moderate extent 4=To a great extent

Table A-2: Descriptive Statistics from the SPeNSE Paperwork Substudy				
Question	**Caseload and Experience**	**Statistic**	**SE**	**Sample Size**
Q1	Mean number of special education students taught	23.9	1.27	972
Q2	Mean number of special education students for whom teachers were case managers	14.5	0.81	970
Q3	Mean number of years teaching special education	14.5	0.44	972
Q3	Percent of teachers who have taught:			
	3 or less years	6.3	1.1	65
	Between 4 and 6 years	14.9	1.5	145
	Between 7 and 9 years	11.5	1.5	121
	10 or more years	67.3	2.4	641
Q4	Mean hours spent in a typical week completing administrative duties and paperwork	6.3	0.3	967
Q4	Percent of teachers who spend time completing administrative duties and paperwork in a typical week:			
	3.5 or fewer hours	40.3	2.5	394
	Between 4 and 6.5 hours	28.2	2.1	269
	Between 7 and 9.5 hours	8.8	1.2	89
	10 or more hours	22.7	2.1	215
Q5	Percent who said time given to complete required administrative duties and paperwork is adequate:			
	Not at all	25.2	2.0	217
	Small extent	32.3	2.2	322
	Moderate extent	33.0	2.3	343
	Great extent	9.5	1.7	83
Question	**Writing IEPs**	**Statistic**	**SE**	**Sample Size**
Q6	Mean number of hours spent:			
	Writing each IEP	2.4	0.1	965
	Attending each IEP meeting	1.5	0.1	964
Q7	Percent whose IEPs are:			
	Written by hand	29.5	3.4	292
	Written by using a computer	32.3	3.1	304
	Written by a combination of a computer and by hand	38.1	2.9	369
Q8	Percent who find the computer they use for completing IEPs reliable:			
	Not at all	3.2	0.9	27
	Small extent	11.8	2.3	80
	Moderate extent	38.6	2.7	277
	Great extent	46.4	3.0	284

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Question	Writing IEPs	Statistic	SE	Sample Size
Q9	Percent who would describe their access to the computer equipment used for completing IEPs:			
	Poor	10.6	2.0	70
	Fair	14.8	2.8	94
	Good	25.9	2.7	171
	Excellent	48.7	3.0	330
Q10	When making a change to an IEP:			
	Percent whose district or school allows addenda	81.6	2.2	786
	Percent who must rewrite the entire IEP	18.4	2.2	154
Q11	Percent who must write or copy the same information in different sections of the IEP:			
	Not at all	9.5	1.6	98
	Small extent	31.7	2.3	327
	Moderate extent	34.9	2.2	340
	Great extent	23.9	2.4	194
Q12	For annual IEP reviews, percent of teachers who:			
	Rewrite the entire document	80.0	2.5	799
	Rewrite only portions of it	20.0	2.5	157
Q13	Mean number of students for whom teachers wrote more than one IEP last year	5.3	0.5	947
Q14	Percent who update their IEPs:			
	On the anniversary of the student's last IEP	76.6	3.0	766
	On the student's birthday	1.5	1.0	14
	At the same time of year for all their students	18.2	2.8	145
	Other	3.7	0.9	40
Q15	Percent who have a list of IEP goals from which to choose in writing IEPs	57.3	2.7	491
Q16	Percent who use the list of IEP goals:			
	Never	3.4	1.2	19
	Rarely	14.9	2.8	67
	Sometimes	24.2	3.5	130
	Often	57.5	4.1	275
Q17	Percent who find specific parts of the IEP process most helpful in educating their students:			
	Attending IEP meetings	16.7	2.3	141
	Documenting the present level of performance	29.5	2.3	292
	Writing annual goals	8.3	1.2	88
	Writing short-term objectives	26.5	2.3	252
	Deciding on services, accommodations, and supports	16.1	1.8	157
	None of the above	2.9	0.8	32

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Question	Writing IEPs	Statistic	SE	Sample Size
Q18	Percent who find specific parts of the IEP process least helpful in educating their students			
	Attending IEP meetings	18.2	2.3	178
	Documenting the present level of performance	10.5	1.4	102
	Writing annual goals	22.3	2.2	194
	Writing short-term objectives	13.4	2.1	112
	Deciding on services, accommodations, and supports	21.6	2.0	208
	None of the above	14.0	1.6	162
Q19	Mean number of hours spent in a typical month on:			
	Printing or making copies of forms specific to special education, such as procedural safeguards	4.2	0.5	967
	Scheduling IEP meetings	2.1	0.2	966
	Mailing notices to parents	1.4	0.2	967
	Tracking paperwork from other teachers that is required for the IEP process or other aspects of special education	4.2	0.3	966
Question	**Student Evaluations**	**Statistic**	**SE**	**Sample Size**
Q20	Percent who conduct initial evaluations for students referred to special education	34.9	2.7	377
Q21	In conducting initial evaluations, mean number of hours spent in a typical month in:			
	Conducting assessments	7.5	0.9	373
	Reviewing existing assessment information	4.2	0.5	374
Q22	Percent who find specific parts of initial evaluations most helpful in educating their students:			
	Conducting eligibility assessments	25.6	3.5	110
	Writing reports of assessment results	7.9	1.7	35
	Completing referrals for initial evaluations	1.6	1.0	5
	Discussing assessment results with colleagues	64.8	3.4	222
	None of the above	0.1	0.1	4
Q23	Percent who find specific parts of initial evaluations least helpful in educating their students:			
	Conducting eligibility assessments	4.8	1.6	21
	Writing reports of assessment results	28.0	3.4	99
	Completing referrals for initial evaluations	56.8	3.5	213
	Discussing assessment results with colleagues	2.9	1.3	13
	None of the above	7.4	2.1	30
Q24	Percent who conduct triennial evaluations to determine if students are still eligible for special education	51.1	2.7	530

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Question	Student Evaluations	Statistic	SE	Sample Size
Q25	For those who conduct triennial evaluations, mean number of hours spent in a typical month:			
	Conducting assessments	5.3	0.5	519
	Reviewing existing assessment information	3.4	0.4	520
Q26	Percent who find specific parts of the triennial evaluations most helpful in educating their students:			
	Conducting assessments	25.0	3.0	155
	Writing reports of assessment results	6.3	1.7	35
	Reviewing existing assessment information	18.6	2.6	80
	Discussing assessment results with colleagues	48.4	3.0	247
	None of the above	1.7	0.8	9
Q27	Percent who find specific parts of the triennial evaluations least helpful in educating their students:			
	Conducting assessments	9.0	2.1	37
	Writing reports of assessment results	51.4	3.4	276
	Reviewing existing assessment information	18.0	3.0	99
	Discussing assessment results with colleagues	9.3	1.7	47
	None of the above	12.3	2.3	67
Question	**Student Behavior**	**Statistic**	**SE**	**Sample Size**
Q28	Mean number of hours spent in a typical month on:			
	Completing functional behavioral assessments	2.1	0.2	967
	Participating in manifestation determination reviews	1.0	0.1	968
	Keeping behavior logs to track frequencies of specific student behaviors	5.4	0.5	971
	Writing behavioral intervention plans	2.3	0.2	968
Q29	Percent who find specific processes most helpful in educating their students:			
	Completing functional behavioral assessments	11.1	1.6	88
	Participating in manifestation determination reviews	3.9	1.0	35
	Keeping behavior logs to track frequencies of specific student behaviors	55.2	2.9	488
	Writing behavioral intervention plans	24.5	2.3	186
	None of the above	5.2	1.1	34
Q30	Percent who find specific processes least helpful in educating their students:			
	Completing functional behavioral assessments	17.0	1.8	142
	Participating in manifestation determination reviews	50.9	2.7	428
	Keeping behavior logs to track frequencies of specific student behaviors	7.3	1.3	51
	Writing behavioral intervention plans	12.9	2.3	107
	None of the above	11.9	1.9	93

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Question	Transition	Statistic	SE	Sample Size
Q31	Mean number of hours spent in a typical month on post-school transition planning for students 14 and older	3.0	0.7	693
Q32	Percent who find specific post-school transition processes most helpful in educating their students:			
	Talking with representatives of other agencies about a students' transition needs	40.2	4.3	139
	Conducting assessments that inform the transition process	14.6	3.0	44
	Arranging transition related courses and work experiences	30.4	3.8	107
	Documenting the transition plans and services	11.2	2.2	40
	None of the above	3.6	1.6	13
Q33	Percent who find specific post-school transition processes least helpful in educating their students:			
	Talking with representatives of other agencies about a students' transition needs	17.9	2.8	58
	Conducting assessments that inform the transition process	14.1	3.3	54
	Arranging transition related courses and work experiences	9.3	2.4	35
	Documenting the transition plans and services	46.5	4.0	161
	None of the above	12.2	3.1	34
Q34	Mean number of hours spent in a typical month participating in Part C to preschool transition planning	0.7	0.1	631
Q35	Percent who find specific Part C to preschool transition processes most helpful in educating their children:			
	Conducting or reviewing assessments that inform the transition process	14.7	3.9	36
	Talking with representatives of other agencies serving the child and family	41.8	6.9	70
	Attending the required transition planning meeting	24.6	6.2	36
	Arranging activities to facilitate transition	16.0	3.9	42
	None of the above	2.9	2.2	4
Q36	Percent who find specific Part C to preschool transition processes least helpful in educating their children:			
	Conducting or reviewing assessments that inform the transition process	15.9	4.0	33
	Talking with representatives of other agencies serving the child and family	10.6	3.4	23
	Attending the required transition planning meeting	21.7	5.0	38
	Arranging activities to facilitate transition	39.4	6.9	61
	None of the above	12.3	3.6	30

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Question	Other Types of Paperwork	Statistic	SE	Sample Size
Q37	Mean frequency with which teachers must prepare written reports for parents on student progress, in weeks	7.2	0.2	966
Q38	Percent who prepare reports on the progress of students with disabilities:			
	More often than what is required for regular education students	54.4	2.4	473
	As often as what is required for regular education students	43.6	2.3	449
	Less often than what is required for regular education students	1.9	0.6	23
Q39	Mean number of minutes it takes to prepare reports on the progress of students with disabilities	462.8	38.6	967
Q40	Percent whose progress reports for their students with disabilities have:			
	The same detail as their reports for regular education students	15.9	1.8	134
	Less detail as their reports for regular education students	4.4	1.4	43
	More detail as their reports for regular education students	79.7	2.2	754
Q41	Mean number of students for whom teachers completed Medicaid reimbursement or other third-party payment forms	1.7	0.36	964
Q42	Percent who must complete Medicaid or third-party reimbursement forms for each eligible student:			
	Weekly	1.1	0.6	4
	Monthly	39.6	8.4	103
	Every 2 months	2.8	1.6	7
	Quarterly	26.6	6.8	66
	Other	29.9	5.6	74
Q44	Mean days teachers had coverage for their class last year so they could complete administrative duties and paperwork	2.4	0.50	961
Q45	Percent who find that they receive help from a paraprofessional, instructional assistant, parent, volunteer, or secretary in completing administrative duties and paperwork			
	Not at all	49.7	2.8	506
	Small extent	26.7	2.5	244
	Moderate extent	13.5	1.6	125
	Great extent	10.1	1.4	94

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Question	Other Types of Paperwork	Statistic	SE	Sample Size
Q46	Mean number of minutes per school day have to complete administrative duties and paperwork	50.0	2.31	968
Q47	Percent who find that administrative duties and paperwork interfere with their job of teaching			
	Not at all	4.6	1.0	44
	Small extent	17.5	2.4	166
	Moderate extent	32.1	2.4	323
	Great extent	45.9	2.5	435

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